

Safe School Meals for Kids Act

Background

Chlorpyrifos is an organophosphate insecticide used primarily to control foliage and soil-borne insect pests on a variety of food and feed crops. It has been registered in the United States since 1965 and is currently registered for agricultural and other limited uses. Although it is intended to affect the nervous system of insects, if ingested, it can affect the human nervous system as well, causing symptoms like nausea, vomiting, convulsions, respiratory paralysis and, in extreme cases, death. Although these symptoms have been linked to chlorpyrifos, this chemical is still ingested by children through their food and can harm the farm workers who handle this pesticide. Children are already exposed to pesticides in schools through grounds maintenance and pest control, but there have been instances where these same chemicals can be ingested through produce served in school meals.

In 2000, residential usage of chlorpyrifos ended after the EPA found unsafe exposures to children. In 2007, environmental organizations petitioned the EPA requesting that the agency revoke all tolerances for chlorpyrifos and cancel all agricultural uses of the insecticide based on evidence that showed neurological harm to children and risks from spray drift. After petitioners filed a series of lawsuits to compel a response from the EPA to their petition had gone unanswered, the EPA proposed to revoke all chlorpyrifos tolerances in response to the agency's scientific findings that the insecticide is unsafe in October 2015. In September 2020, however, the EPA has rejected scientific evidence linking the pesticide chlorpyrifos to serious health problems, directly contradicting federal scientists' conclusions five years ago that it can stunt brain development in children.¹ In announcing its decision, the EPA said that "despite several years of study, the science addressing neurodevelopmental effects remains unresolved."

Finding a Solution

There needs to be a balance between allowing farmers to use the insecticide, as it is instrumental to tend crops during harvest season, and limiting the amount of the insecticide that is used in the procurement of fruits and vegetables so that it won't cause harm to children who consume these foods and the farmers who have to use it.

Bill Summary

The Safe School Meals bill sets a de minimis chlorpyrifos residue threshold of 0.001 mcg/kg – *which is as low as we can test with wet chemistry* – and prohibits procurement of fresh fruits and vegetables that exceed that level for programs like the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Summer Food Service Program etc. The Safe School Meals for Kids Act will require that the Secretary of Agriculture:

- Establish a maximum residue level of 0.001 microgram/kilogram for chlorpyrifos on foods
- Prohibit the procurement of foods that exceed the maximum residue level for school nutrition programs including National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child Care and Adult Care Food Program, and Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Conduct reviews every two years for 10 years on the compliance of schools with this rule

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/climate/epa-pesticide-chlorpyrifos-children.html>

Cosponsors

Senator Cory Booker
Senator Alex Padilla
Senator Bernie Sanders

Endorsements

Center for Biological Diversity
National Education Association
National Family Farm Coalition
Environmental Working Group
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Center for Food Safety
Toxic Free North Carolina
Children's Environmental Health Network
Student Action with Farmworkers